



# 1

## Improving the school experiences of disabled children

Inclusive education (or 'inclusion') is an international response to the view that *all* children have the right to educational opportunity. It involves significant changes in thinking and action in education, from the level of education policy through to classroom practice, so that teachers can reach out to every child in their classroom.

Inclusion is concerned with the education of all children and young people, and particularly with those who are socially and/or academically excluded at school (Ainscow, 1999). For example, some children and young people in economically poor countries do not have access to education at all, while in other countries students may leave school without qualifications, be placed in 'special' segregated places away from their peers, or choose to leave school because school seems irrelevant to their lives.

The difficulties faced by these students and others provide us with an incentive to look at how schools can be changed and teaching approaches improved 'in ways that will lead them to respond differently to student diversity – seeing individual differences not as problems to be fixed, but as opportunities for experimentation in order to develop more effective practices' (Ainscow, 2008, p241).

Disabled children and young people are at the centre of what education researcher Roger Slee (2005) describes as 'the battleground of schooling for disabled students' (p154). Disabled students have a history of being excluded in education in a variety of ways. Historically, parents and others internationally have fought for children's basic rights to receive an education when governments provided no access at all. Segregated places, such as special schools, units and classes, were government responses to parent requests for education for their children. These initial battles need to be understood and appreciated as part of the history of gaining access to education for disabled students.

However, research in education and disability over the past three decades has highlighted some major problems with special education thinking and provision, including:

- the association of disability with negative understandings about 'deviance' and 'difference'

- the separation of disabled people from the community
- social and academic disadvantage as common experiences of disabled people. (MacArthur, Kelly, Higgins, Phillips, McDonald, Morton and Jackman, 2005; Rustemier, 2004.)

These points are explored in more detail throughout this book. Various accounts from disabled people themselves, including disabled researchers, outline their experience of segregated schooling and special education, and the struggles that they, their families and advocates have put up with in order to have a place in the community, in neighbourhood schools and in early childhood settings (Ballard, 1994, 1999, 2004a; Ballard and McDonald, 1999; Brown, 1999a, 1999b; Higgins, 2001; Higgins and Ballard, 2000; Kearney, 2009; MacArthur, 2004; MacArthur, Dight and Purdue, 2002; MacArthur, Purdue and Ballard, 2003; Purdue, 2004; Purdue, Ballard and MacArthur, 2001, for some New Zealand accounts; and Slee, 2005, for references to other international accounts).

These concerns are not limited to segregated settings, and the research also describes disabled students in regular schools and classrooms who experience real challenges as they negotiate a difficult school day (Ballard, 1994, 1999; Kaverman, 1998; MacArthur, Sharp, Kelly and Gaffney, 2007; MacArthur, Sharp, Gaffney and Kelly, 2007, for some New Zealand examples). It is these concerns that have led to questions about the rights of disabled children and young people to a decent education in their local school, and to the development internationally of 'inclusive education'.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, IHC supports many families who want their disabled sons and daughters to be included and taught in their local school. Too many of these families have experienced discrimination – their children have been denied access to a good quality education. Inclusive education is central to IHC's philosophy, emphasising as it does the rights of all disabled people to live and fully participate in the community across their lifespan.

Education shapes and defines our communities and is the key to an ordinary and satisfying life for disabled people. Inclusive schools contribute to inclusive communities. In inclusive communities, the barriers to community participation experienced by disabled people and their families are reduced because such communities expect, understand and respond to diversity in positive and supportive ways.



Questions about how to address the limitations of 'special education' and promote change in schools to include and support the education of all students were addressed at the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education in 1994. This was attended by 94 governments, non-governmental organisations and UN agencies (UNESCO Institute for Education, 1994). The Salamanca Statement that emerged from this meeting promoted inclusive education as a necessary part of achieving an inclusive society. It described inclusive schools as a vital ingredient to combat discrimination and build inclusive societies where there is 'education for all' (p.iv). The agreement provided an important starting point for the next 10 years of efforts by many countries to move educational policy and practice in a more inclusive direction (Ainscow, 2008).

However, inclusive education is not always well understood and there are many different viewpoints about what it is and what it looks like in practice. Partly this confusion comes from the fact that inclusion can be defined in a number of ways, depending on the nature of the school and community in which it is being developed (Ainscow, 2008).

But confusion also arises because ideas about inclusion are not always informed by education research. For example, inclusion has been inappropriately described as the placement of students with disabilities into regular schools without any requirement for change in schools or education systems. It has even been associated with the education of disabled children in separate places using 'special education' approaches to teaching (Connor and Ferri, 2007; Slee, 2001, 2005). These inaccurate viewpoints make it difficult for interested groups to communicate clearly, and for those wanting an inclusive education system to advocate for change (Ainscow, Booth and Dyson, 2006; Higgins, MacArthur and Morton, 2008; Higgins, MacArthur and Rietveld, 2006).

## The aim of this book

This book aims to provide readers with clarity by presenting a current perspective on inclusion as it is described in the research literature in education. The meaning and features of inclusion are explored as they relate to policy, school culture and school change, and teaching practice in classrooms.

To understand the development of inclusive thinking in education, it is also important to understand segregation and exclusion in education. This book also considers the impact of segregated schooling versus inclusive approaches on disabled students' learning and social experiences.

Disabled children and young people can also be excluded in regular schools, when, for example, they are ignored by their teachers and by peers; when the effects of their impairments are not understood; when they are bullied; or when there are insufficient resources and supports for their teachers to teach them well. Some of the recent research on disabled students' school experiences is also reviewed, to show how student knowledge and ideas may support schools to change so they are understanding of, and responsive to, diversity.

## Language

The term 'student' is used in this book to refer to children and young people participating in the school system. Consistent with the stated preference of the international disabled persons' movement, and the social model of disability, the term 'disabled student' is used, rather than 'students with disabilities'. In placing the word disabled first, the term disabled person or disabled student emphasises the point that people with impairments are disabled – and discriminated against when they live in an unresponsive society where they are treated unequally, or when they are taught in schools that do not acknowledge and respond to diversity in its student group.

The terms 'special' and 'regular' education are used to refer to two different types of education settings for disabled students. 'Special education' usually refers to separate places for disabled students to learn and includes special schools, units and classes. The term special education also refers to a particular way of thinking about disabled students that suggests that they are 'different' and in need of specialist approaches at school. These approaches (such as high levels of 1:1 teacher aide support, and frequent withdrawal for specialist teaching approaches and therapies) separate out disabled students from their peers, and can be found in any New Zealand school. The term 'regular education' refers to ordinary schools and



classrooms attended by most children. These are the schools and classrooms that need to become inclusive settings.

## Research

This is a research-based book. Inclusive education is explored through an appreciation of research in the fields of education and disability. The research that supports a particular finding, statement, conclusion or argument is included in brackets in the text, and references to this work are listed at the end. This is a small book that covers a range of topics. Interested readers who want to explore any ideas and issues in depth are referred to the reference list and bibliography.







# 2

## Medical and social models of disability

How we think about disability is very important in any discussion about the inclusion of disabled people in the community and in regular schools (Ash, Bellew, Davies, Newman and Richardson, 2005). It's therefore useful to look at two models that are often used to show how thinking about disability has been shaped – the 'medical model' and the 'social model' of disability (Reiser and Mason, 1992).

### The medical model

The medical model of disability associates disability with damage and disease. People who think in terms of the medical model see disability as a problem in the disabled person that comes from their impairment (that is, their difficulty in seeing or hearing well, being unable to move easily, or needing more time to learn and understand). In the medical-model approach to disability, disabled people are thought of as 'deviant' because they are considered to be different (in negative ways) from what the rest of society considers 'normal'.

In a society where medical-model thinking is common, the aim is to eliminate or reduce these differences through remedial treatments. So, disabled people are 'objects' to be 'treated' and changed in accord with the standards commonly accepted by society. Failure to change becomes primarily the problem of disabled people themselves (Ash et al, 2005, p236).

People working in the education system who use medical-model thinking view the challenges faced by disabled students as coming from their impairments (often described as their 'deficits' or 'problems'), rather than from inadequacies in the classroom or school. The purpose of education for disabled students is therefore considered to be remediation – 'fixing' or changing students to make them 'more normal'.

This kind of thinking has meant that all over the world disabled children and young people have been categorised and labelled according to the type or 'severity' of their disability, and separated out from nondisabled students so they can have 'specialised' teaching.

This approach has removed disabled children from regular education in neighbourhood schools, and has meant that these regular schools have not been required to change in order to meet the needs of all the children and young people in their local community. The medical model says that the child is impaired. The education system has created special education for these impaired children.

The growth of special education and of special education language and practices that separate out disabled students comes mainly from a deep-seated, medical-model way of thinking (McDonnell, 2002). New Zealand researcher Keith Ballard (2004a) has talked about the power of such language to exclude disabled children. Words that have become familiar in relation to disabled students are those such as 'special education', 'special needs', 'problem', 'difficulty', 'intervention', 'therapy', 'disorder', 'diagnosis', 'placement' (as Slee, 2005, points out, nondisabled students are enrolled in schools, but disabled students are 'placed'). With these come a string of impairment-related labels often used to define disabled children (as in 'He is autistic').

These words carry a message that students are different, unable and in need of specialist care. In education, they are words that can determine who is 'in' and who is 'out' (Slee, 2001).

Such language can be powerful in labelling and stigmatising disabled people as not human, as 'not like me', and therefore eligible to be excluded (Ballard, 2004b). It is not surprising, then, that some teachers have low expectations for disabled students' learning, and may consider themselves unable or untrained to teach disabled students in their classrooms. Because such language carries a message that exclusion in education is appropriate for disabled students, Ballard (2004a) argues that it must be resisted and rejected. Instead, language used in education to describe students and their learning should recognise that disabled students are active and competent children and young people with the same rights as others.

Deficit-focused ideas about any students are very powerful, and can strongly influence what teachers and other staff do at every level in any school (Ainscow et al, 2006; Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, and Teddy, 2007).



Ainscow and his colleagues (2006) point out that the way in which teaching methods are designed, selected and used in classrooms comes from the way teachers and others view the children and young people they work with. If teachers believe that disabled students are in need of fixing, or are 'deficient' in some way, they will not be effective teachers.

Work towards inclusive education therefore requires a complete shift away from ideas about 'special education'. As long as 'special' education is seen as the way to teach disabled children and young people, attention is taken away from the more important question that many of their parents, caregivers and whanau in New Zealand are asking: Why do regular schools so often fail to teach disabled students successfully? (Ainscow, 2008; Ainscow, Booth and Dyson, 2006; Ballard, 2004a; Slee, 2001, 2005.)

## The social model

The social model of disability offers an alternative to medical-model thinking and practice. The social model of disability is now widely used internationally, and emphasises the idea that 'disability' is constructed by a society that is overly concerned with 'normality'.

From a social model point of view, the experience of disability does not come from impairment, that is, from bodily experiences, such as difficulty moving one's body, or experiencing challenges with vision or hearing. Instead, the experience of disability comes from living in a society that views some people as abnormal and then fails to respond to or support them.

Disabled people who live in a society that views them in this way face a number of barriers to their full participation in the community, because they are considered different and unable to fit in with the rest of 'us'. Because society is not prepared to change, disabled people are oppressed and discriminated against.

The social model suggests that it is not disabled people who should have to change to fit society's ideas about 'normality', rather it is society that needs to change, to get rid of ideas about normal and abnormal, and to be more respectful towards and inclusive of diversity (Ash et al, 2005).

In education, the social model supports the development of inclusive education by turning attention to the ways in which regular schools can support disabled students to learn and have positive social relationships. Researchers who support a social model of disability '...argue that inclusive education encourages personal and social relationships and attitudes based on a view that disability is part of, not outside, the ordinary range of human diversity' (Ash et al, 2005, p236). This idea has helped researchers to appreciate that an important foundation for inclusion is the commitment to a set of inclusive values (such as equity, participation and respect for diversity) in schools and communities (Ainscow, Booth and Dyson, 2006).

The social model also helps us to appreciate that students in regular schools who have impairments will experience disability when they are excluded from the peer group, bullied by peers, ignored in the classroom, or do not have access to the human and material resources needed to support their participation and learning. Teachers who take a medical-model approach will attribute students' learning challenges or their failure to make friends at school to their impairment, and few, if any, attempts will be made to change the school, classroom or teaching approaches.

While teachers may need to consider the effects of a student's impairment on their learning and social experiences, the social model draws attention to the need to identify barriers to learning and participation at school, such as bullying or being ignored or a lack of resources, and to consider how these barriers can be reduced or eliminated. These key ideas about inclusive values and barriers to learning and participation are central in thinking about inclusive education and are explored more fully in the following chapter.





# 3

## What inclusion means

Inclusion is not something that can be easily defined. In fact, researchers working with schools to support the development of inclusive approaches to teaching and learning, say that it is neither possible nor desirable to try to come up with a fixed definition, because inclusion means different things to different groups in different contexts. However, it is still possible to explain in broad terms what inclusion is about.

British researchers, Mel Ainscow, Tony Booth and Alan Dyson (2006) have worked with 25 primary and secondary schools in the United Kingdom, as part of their research on improving schools and developing inclusion. Readers interested in a more detailed understanding of how cultures, policies and practices are developed in schools working towards inclusion are referred to their excellent book, or to a summary of the authors' research findings ([www.tlrp.org](http://www.tlrp.org)). Their work is central to this section because it allows us to think about the meaning of inclusion through the day-to-day experiences of teachers and other staff in schools.

Ainscow et al (2006) describe the inclusive school as one that has not reached a perfect state, but rather is on the move. Inclusion is thought of as a process of improving schools. Those involved in education strive to overcome barriers to learning and participation at all levels of the education system – educational policy, school organisation and structure, and teaching ideas and practices. School systems that are working towards inclusion therefore focus on change in order to improve all students' education experiences (Booth, 2002; Education Queensland, 2001). Inclusion is a deliberate approach in education that involves particular values, and applies to all learners, to all barriers and to all forms of marginalisation, exclusion and underachievement (Ainscow et al, 2006).

### Presence, participation and achievement

Inclusion requires that all students are accepted and take a full and active part in school life as valued members of ordinary classrooms in regular schools (Ballard, 2004a; Slee 2001).

This idea has led to an emphasis on students' presence, participation and achievement in education.

Schools operate in different contexts and face different issues that are of particular significance in different places and at different times. Because of this, schools will work towards inclusion in different ways, but what is common is that teachers and other staff work together towards a common goal.

### Presence

Presence refers to the place of children and young people in their local regular school. Being present in ordinary classrooms alongside peers in a regular school is a critical feature of inclusion. Students can only develop a sense of belonging in their local community and learn to be part of that community by being present in their local community and school.

### Participation

Participation refers to the extent to which students actually take part and benefit from their involvement in the life of the school through both curricular and extra-curricular activities. Ainscow (2008) describes one school that collected evidence of student participation by interviewing students themselves about their involvement in the school. The school used the student experiences and ideas as the stimulus for staff development focused on improving student participation.

Ideas about students' participation at school can also be linked to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989). Children's participation rights are based on recognition of children as full human beings with rights, dignity and identities that should be respected.

Most importantly, children have the right to be consulted and taken account of, to physical integrity, to access to information, to freedom of speech and opinion, and to participate in and challenge decisions made on their behalf (Smith, 1997). Teachers might consider the extent to which these rights are respected.

Do all children in their school have opportunities to use these rights to exercise power and decision-making responsibilities?



In the case of disabled students, teachers may want to consider whether teachers' values lead them to respect or ignore their students' views in the teaching process. For example, from talking with some New Zealand students, MacArthur, Sharp, Kelly and Gaffney (2007) found that disabled children's rights to fully participate at school could be at risk. Because the students were seen as both children and disabled, they were unlikely to be seen as competent to contribute to decision-making processes that affected them.

In New Zealand and elsewhere, inclusion has often been seen as concerned only with the education of disabled students. However, Ainscow et al (2006), among others, suggest that this is not a helpful way to think about inclusion as it limits those who need attention. New Zealand researcher Keith Ballard (2009) says that a focus on disability is important because disabled children so often experience exclusion and low expectations. Nonetheless, the idea of inclusion would make no sense if only one group of students were attended to. Inclusion, therefore, must attend to any barrier to participation and as a matter of social justice must challenge barriers experienced by any child in any school.

## Achievement

Schools have an important role to play in recognising and compensating for unequal situations and inequality of opportunity for any of their students, particularly where they are vulnerable to being devalued and excluded (Slee, 2005). This could include students who are from a range of ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds; students with disabilities; students who move schools often or do not attend school regularly; students who live in poverty; and students who are gay or lesbian. Ainscow et al (2006) emphasise that inclusion and exclusion are linked, and that developments towards inclusion must also involve the active combating of exclusion for these students.

A focus on achievement for all students means that schools are alert to the experiences of all their students, and are responsive when inequality of resources or experience is an issue of concern. For disabled students, teachers may, for example, need to learn about disability issues and seek input from disability advocates on human rights and social justice.

Schools may also need to ensure that the assessment tools they use to evaluate their students' progress are relevant and responsive to the students themselves, and acknowledge learning in positive ways (Higgins, 2005). At the time of writing this book, the New Zealand Ministry of Education was developing a set of curriculum exemplars for some disabled students that are credit based (that is, students are viewed as capable, and assessment focuses on positive changes in students). The assessment process involves teachers using a descriptive narrative approach that encourages them to be sensitive to their students' progress in relation to both achievement objectives and key competencies.

## A commitment to key values

Researchers interested in inclusion have consistently emphasised that inclusion is strongly based on a commitment to key values and principles that apply to all students – and to all the policies, plans and approaches used to teach (Ainscow, et al, Ballard, 2004a; Booth, Nes and Stromstadt, 2003). The main focus needs to be on values, rather than on trying to identify particular 'inclusive' teaching practices. This is because values shape what teachers think and do: the way they view their students; their community; their school and its purpose; their work in the classroom; and the overall aims of education within the community and society as a whole.

The development of inclusion involves making these values explicit, understanding what they mean, and learning how to relate what is done in education to them. Through this process, schools and wider school systems develop the policies, practices, systems and structures that bring these values to life and give them meaning.

On the basis of their work with schools in the United Kingdom, Ainscow and colleagues (2006) describe a set of values that are the basis for action and future directions when schools are working towards inclusion. However, they emphasise that this is not a static list.

These values are constantly being questioned, discussed and developed, and their exact meaning and what they look like in practice is open to negotiation within and between schools.





Some of these values, such as sustainability and the valuing of international communities, have obvious global significance. They encourage schools to think about how they too contribute to the creation and maintenance of healthy communities, both locally and beyond the boundaries of their own country. Their developing list includes the following:

- **Equity** – understanding what ‘equality of opportunity’ and ‘inequality’ means.
- **Participation** – being with and collaborating with others; active engagement and involvement in making decisions; recognising and valuing a variety of identities so people are accepted for who they are.
- **Community** – the social role of education in creating and maintaining communities is valued; communities and educational institutions can mutually sustain each other; citizenship and global citizenship (which goes beyond the family and nation state); cultivating feelings of public service.
- **Compassion**
- **Respect for diversity**
- **Sustainability** – the fundamental aim of education is to prepare children and young people for sustainable ways of life within sustainable communities and environments. Inclusion should therefore be concerned with understanding global warming and responses to it.
- **Entitlement** – the recognition and conviction that children and young people have rights to a broad education, appropriate support and to attendance at their local school.

As described in Chapter 4, ‘Maori and inclusion, the bicultural foundations of Aotearoa New Zealand’, and a recognition of the Treaty of Waitangi as a social justice concern, mean that cultural values that are particularly significant to Maori will also have a central place in our schools’ (Bishop and Glynn, 1999; Phillips, 2005).

*The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007a, p10) also identifies a set of key values that are to be encouraged, modelled and explored in schools. Schools are asked to encourage students

to have respect for oneself, others and human rights and to value:

- **excellence**, by aiming high and by persevering in the face of difficulties
- **innovation, inquiry and curiosity**, by thinking critically, creatively and reflectively
- **diversity**, as found in our different cultures, languages and heritages
- **equity**, through fairness and social justice
- **community and participation** for the common good
- **ecological sustainability**, which includes care for the environment
- **integrity**, which includes being honest, responsible and accountable, and acting ethically.

The curriculum notes that the ways in which these values are expressed in each school will be guided by dialogue between the school and its community, and that values will be evident in a school’s philosophy, structures, curriculum, classroom and relationships, and through everyday actions and interactions within a school.

Values can be expanded into clusters that encourage children to explore their wider meaning. For example, ‘community and participation for the common good’ is associated with values and notions such as peace, citizenship and manaakitanga (kindness, hospitality). Other values might also have a place, for example, teachers might want to consider the place in their school and local community of values such as freedom, achievement and spirituality (Ainscow et al, 2006).

## Identifying barriers to learning and participation

As described earlier, teachers who take a medical-model approach look for problems in their students (such as their impairment in the case of disabled students), and explain their students’ failure at school in terms of their perceived ‘problems’.



An alternative view of students who are marginalised from and within schools is to see them *as active and capable learners*. When students encounter difficulties with their learning, teachers who think in this way will look at the school and classroom environment, and consider the barriers to learning that students may be encountering. For example, teachers may consider whether students feel safe to put their hand up in class and participate in class discussions, or whether they fear being bullied because of the way they speak. They may consider whether a student can write quickly enough, or whether they need a laptop to do their class work. Or they may look at the structures and attitudes in the school that relate to disability, such as withdrawal for specialist support or therapy, and ask whether separating children encourages a view that they are problems to be fixed by experts, or whether the practices reinforce a child's belonging in the group of all children at school.

When inclusion involves identifying the barriers that students face to their learning and participation at school, resources are provided to schools so that teachers can support students. In this way, support is seen as any and all activities that increase the capacity of schools to respond to diversity in the student group (Ainscow et al, 2006).

In the above examples, a teacher may address the issue of a disabled student's reluctance to speak in class by seeking support from a colleague to work out how to create a social environment in the classroom in which diversity is expected and supported, and where bullying does not happen. Equally an up-to-date laptop may prove to be an efficient way to support a student to get through their work in class time, as well as being a 'cool' device that attracts the involvement of other students in class.

If the barriers come from structures that separate students or from negative attitudes about disability and diversity, the school may need to confront and explore these by asking disabled students for their views on the various support arrangements in the school. Responses to these questions could be used to consider more inclusive approaches that keep disabled students with their peers.

Identifying barriers in this way does not deny that a student's impairment can influence their learning. Teachers who are alert to barriers will also consider the impact of students' impairments,

for example, how a student with autism may feel in a busy and noisy classroom, or what can be done to ensure a student with mobility difficulties has sufficient time to move between classes.

### Involving the community

Strong links with the local community are a central concern of inclusive schools (Ainscow et al, 2006; Slee, 2005). Ainscow and colleagues remind us that schools and their local communities have a relationship where they support each other – schools provide educational opportunities, but so do communities, and schools can support communities in this role. The close relationship between a local school and its community means that the development of schools is also concerned with aspirations for the development of decent neighbourhoods for all. Inclusion is therefore concerned with 'good' local schools that encourage the participation of all within their communities (Ainscow et al, 2006).

Schools in Aotearoa New Zealand can develop a range of ways to involve parents, caregivers and other community members in the daily life of the school, and in so doing establish strong and collaborative relationships between families, school staff and others. School boards of trustees are required to undertake regular consultation with their school community about the values that are significant and important.

School communities, boards of trustees, and local community agencies and groups with an interest in education can also be part of schools' ongoing discussions as they begin working towards inclusion. Where schools are particularly concerned about improving their teaching in relation to disabled students, interested others could include disabled adults (Slee, 2005), young disabled school leavers, and parents and caregivers of disabled children.

### What inclusion is not

It is important to note that the term 'inclusion' can be hijacked and used in inappropriate and inaccurate ways (Slee and Allan, 2005).





This misuse has led to considerable confusion about what inclusion really is and, in some sectors, has resulted in inclusion being viewed as nothing more than a well-intentioned but pie-in-the-sky fad (Connor and Ferri, 2007). Our understandings about inclusion are improved through an exploration of what inclusion is not.

### **Inclusion is not the re-labelling of 'special education'**

Inclusion cannot occur in segregated settings, such as special schools, units and classes. Education researchers Roger Slee and Julie Alan (2005) note that inclusion has been misinterpreted to the point where claims have been made that inclusion occurs when a special school is relocated onto the grounds of a regular school so that students can share some activities. They note also that, in Australia, some faculties of education in universities have employed special educators to train new teachers to be 'inclusive'. Similarly, the *New Zealand Education Gazette*, which is read by a large number of teachers, has described as 'inclusive' a segregated special school located on the site of Templeton Hospital on the outskirts of Christchurch city (Feltham, 2004).

Ideas about making regular schools 'more special' to support inclusion go back a long way, and have influenced the development of special units attached to regular schools.

However, these views (that claim to be 'new concepts of inclusion') simply perpetuate the myth that segregated education in 'special' places such as special schools, units and classes are necessary for some students. This point has been widely criticised in the research literature.

'Special education has been described, not just as a place, but as a deep-seated way of thinking about disabled students that leads to their exclusion from the fabric of everyday life, and a denial of their rights to a decent education in their local school (Adams, Swain and Clark, 2000; Ballard, 2004a; McDonnell, 2002; Slee, 2001).

As discussed later in this book, the research also shows that, despite the promise of more 'specialised' teaching approaches, segregated 'special education' approaches have actually disadvantaged disabled children, both academically and socially

(MacArthur, Kelly and Higgins, 2005). It is for all of these reasons that Roger Slee (2001), an international researcher, teacher educator and also past Deputy Director of Education Queensland, has argued that we need to leave behind all 'special education' thinking and practice wherever it occurs, and develop education in regular schools which carefully attends to the diverse needs of all students.

### **Inclusion is not the same as simply being in a regular school**

Inclusive education can only be developed in regular schools, but it is important to appreciate that inclusion does not occur simply because a disabled student attends their local school. Special education and medical-model thinking can be found in some regular schools, and students can face considerable barriers to their learning and participation (Ainscow et al, 2006; Kearney, 2009; MacArthur, Sharp, Kelly and Gaffney, 2007). Some examples of these barriers are provided in Chapter 9. Inclusion involves fundamental changes in regular education so that regular schools can teach all children well.

### **Inclusion is not 'ideology'**

Often those people who want an inclusive education system are criticised for being motivated by ideology rather than evidence. Yet this view is readily challenged because inclusive education is actually a complex, extensively researched, and legitimate approach to teaching and learning, school organisation, and policy development. Internationally, there are entire school districts that have rejected segregation, and deliberately and specifically identify themselves as inclusive (see, for example, Hill, 2002, in relation to New Brunswick, Canada; Carrington and Robinson, 2002; and Slee, 2005, in relation to Queensland, Australia).

The term ideological is sometimes used to deny the status and worth of another's position while elevating one's own position on segregation to a superior vantage point. Thomas and Loxley (2007) say that labelling arguments about inclusion as ideological is a way of discrediting others' viewpoints by implying that their position is somehow partisan ranting, politically contentious, sloppy or simply false. This approach to the idea of inclusive education is unhelpful.



It puts an end to open discussion about the rights of all children and young people to a quality education that enhances their present life in the community, and prepares them well for an adult life in the future. It also puts an end to important discussions about how regular schools can move, change and develop in positive ways to improve all students' learning and participation.